Interview with Diane Dillard

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DIANE DILLARD

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Diane and I are old friends from way back. We served together in Athens in the early 1970s. Diane, before we concentrate on the consular side, could you give us an idea of your background?

DILLARD: I was born in Dallas, Texas, and went to school there. I went to North Texas State. My first real trip was to Europe, and that was the summer that all the planes were crashing, so I felt sure I would never see Dallas again. That trip really whetted my appetite, but it was a good many years before I got back to Europe. Three friends and I took the summer off from our jobs and we traveled with the Dallas International Cultural and Social Circle, most of whom were war brides who were taking the children home to see the relatives. We traveled around Europe for two and a half months. I wanted to stay, but I had to come home.

Then I learned about the Foreign Service. I went to a wedding in South Dakota and met somebody who had been in the Foreign Service. I didn't know anything about it, except it was a chance to work overseas. I came in as a secretary. Fortunately, for me, my first post was Paris, where I had very little to do. If I had gone to another post, and had a good secretarial job, I probably would have stayed a secretary.

But they were in desperate need of consular officers and admin officers, and I took the exam and passed that, and had an oral exam and passed that. I went into a junior officer orientation class and was chosen to go to Athens.

Q: Can we start getting some years?

DILLARD: I came into the Foreign Service in 1965, and I went into the junior officer class in August 1967. I longed to go to Athens, but certainly would never have had the nerve to ask for it. I was thoroughly astounded and pleased that I got it.

The minute I arrived there, I went in to the personnel officer and said, “I'd like to stay three years, please.”

She said, “Well, we usually don't do that until a person has been here six months at the minimum.” So six months to the day I went in and said, “I want to stay here three years, please,” I think they let me do it because they thought, “Well, she's just going to be a consular hack, anyway, so let her stay three years.”

Then I was assigned to Monterrey, Mexico in 1972, after Spanish and after taking an exam to fly up to being a full officer. I got to Monterrey on May 5, 1972, and I left on May 7, 1974, two days and four hours over two years. It was that kind of post.

Q: I want to come back to that, but let's run through this chronologically.

DILLARD: From there I came to Washington, where I worked in the visa office in coordination, which has to do with security matters, 27, 28, 29, clauses of the Immigration and Nationality Act. I did that for two years and I learned an awful lot. It was really invaluable.

Then I was a career development officer for consular officers for three years, and then I had a Congressional Fellowship for a year. At the end of my Congressional Fellowship, in

August of 1980 I went to London to head the Non-Immigrant Visa Section. I stayed there through getting AVLOS started. That's a computer program to record all the names of all the applicants for non-immigrant visas, and to check them through the system, but also to retain the list of names, which was quite useful in a post like that. We processed almost a million visas the same year we were putting in the system, so it was pretty harried. I left there after two years.

I volunteered to go to Beirut for money and sunshine, and I got money and sunshine there. Then after two years in Beirut, I was assigned to Florence. I was back in Washington for language training and a long home leave, and I was to go to the NATO College in Rome, but my mother had cancer, so they let me stay with her through her treatments. She recovered, and I went direct to Florence as consul general. I left there in August of 1989, and I am going to Paris to be consul general in March 1990.

Q: Very good. I might explain that this interview is concentrating on the consul experience, because we are working on creating a collection of experiences and stories concerning consular work, which we hope to use for consular training.

Diane, we are looking at several areas. One area is the experience of junior officers. Could you give me an idea of your junior officer experience, first in Athens? Maybe this is difficult because I was in charge.

DILLARD: Well, I'll concentrate on the part before you got there. [Laughter]

Q: Then particularly Monterrey.

DILLARD: Yes. It was a mill. Athens was, of course, my first tour as a consular officer. You may recall that at that time the consular course was an intense period of trying to memorize the FAMs, as they're called, our manuals of operation. That meant studying well into the night, or falling asleep and getting up at 2:00 a.m. and studying.

So when I got to post, naturally, I didn't really know a lot about the work. I hadn't had hands-on training at FSI. In Athens I had two very difficult colleagues who tended to abuse the applicants, and I sat in with them on immigrant visa interviews, and I thought, “I can't do this work if this is the way you have to do it. I cannot treat people like this if this.” But then the chief of the visa section came along and did some interviews with me and was certainly a professional, and I thought, “I can do this.”

It was a very good training program. I gained experience in both non-immigrant visas and immigrant visas. We had an excellent supervisor for training junior officers. She required that we make extensive notes, which were reviewed, and if she had questions, they were discussed with us. So we learned to do it right.

Q: Who was the supervisor?

DILLARD: It was Lois Day. She was just superb. The immigrant visa work was—as I said, two of my colleagues were kind of hard on people, so if they got me, the applicants were most grateful and kissing the hem of my garment. They'd say, “Go for the little one!” [Laughter]

Q: I might remark that as we sit here, Diane does not tower over me. [Laughter]

DILLARD: So then those two people left and more ordinary people came in. I trained the new ones, and the applicants really didn't have the respect for me that they had had before. They'd come in very nonchalantly. So I realized that I wasn't wonderful; just by comparison I was wonderful. I got to learn a little bit about citizenship and welfare and whereabouts, and I had a brief stint as the personnel officer. There wasn't a rotation program, per se, in the embassy at that point. It was a very good training, because when I got to Monterrey, I had to just step right into the work. It was just an incredible situation.

Q: What was the situation consular-wise in Monterrey?

DILLARD: The post was there to do consular work. There was an economic/commercial officer. There were drug enforcement agents located there, as well as a legal attach#, but it all had to do with things which are consular, like drugs and criminals and all those tasks we deal with.

In the immigrant visa section, there were seven Mexican employees and four interviewing officers. It was a kind of cattle pen type of thing. We had to use microphones to call the people up first to give their documents, then into our offices. The Mexicans are really very gentle people, and it was kind of a barbarous situation. We never seemed to get through with our work; it was incredible.

Then the inspectors came but didn't stay very long. No one stayed very long in Monterrey. [Laughter] But the consular inspector said, “Something is wrong here. These people are working as hard as they can work, and you're not getting the work done. You have to look at it.” He said this to me, a junior officer. Well, Monterrey was the kind of place where there was nothing to do.

Q: What do you mean?

DILLARD: Outside of work. So I started staying every day and finishing up all the cases. Usually your national employees actually prepare the visas and assemble them. So I stayed and did their leftover work, and I timed myself on the various parts of the assembly. I was sure the national employees would work much faster than I was because I wasn't used to the work and I had to keep looking in the FAM to make sure I had everything in the right order. So I did that for about a week.

I figured out that it is possible to have an assembly line—a humane assembly line—what we were doing was inhumane both to the employees and to the applicants. So anything was going to be better.

I went to my immediate boss and said that I thought if we changed the system, we could get the work done. He was agreeable, and he gave me some ideas. He asked me to work it up, and then I presented it to the national employees, who were a little leery of the whole thing, in particular one of them. But we did work it out.

We did set up an assembly line, but what we did was switch people from task to task so it didn't become too onerous, each thing, and they did develop a competition with each other on how many they could do and how nicely they could type the visas. It was a team spirit, and it worked wonderfully well. We went from not doing 55 a day to doing 155 a day, with not a great deal of overtime, because we didn't have any money. We had to give comp time; that's all we could do. So I felt very pleased with the results.

Monterrey was the kind of city where it was difficult to belong. It was too close to the border for the Mexicans to be impressed with you. You weren't even loved because you were a consul. You weren't loved because you were an American. You had no entr# into a very traditional society which didn't have a role for women. But the work was very challenging and it was very good for my career to have nothing else to do but work. [Laughter]

From visas I got to go to the American Services Branch, and that was really my first experience with that work. I found that whatever happened on duty, after hours, was given to me because I was working the American Services Branch. So it meant I was on duty for six months, really. All we had was a recording system on the consulate telephone giving our home numbers; we didn't have any Marine guards or anyone to answer the phone, so once you were on duty, you had to be home. It made it hard when you needed to visit people in the hospital and such as that.

Because of the proximity to the border—and this is something that you don't realize until you've served at a border post—not right on the border, but it was close enough—you run into so many Americans who you wouldn't ordinarily run into overseas, because they just

wouldn't get there, but they can get in a car and drive down to northern Mexico and get in an awful lot of trouble because they have no understanding of their own culture, much less another culture. So we had a lot of very strange things happen, and I had to pray a lot because I didn't have any earthly guidance. There wasn't anybody to turn to.

Q: Can you think of any examples?

DILLARD: I had a situation where a young woman took a bus down to Monterrey, and on the bus she took an overdose of sleeping pills. Fortunately, the bus driver was sharp. He drove immediately to the emergency ward of a hospital, with the whole busload of people.

The Social Security person at the hospital wanted to throw her out of the hospital, and so then I'd talk to the doctors and they'd say, “No, no, she can't go out.” But I didn't know who controlled the situation. I didn't really know what to do about her. We couldn't get any information. There was a young woman, an American, who was at the hospital studying to be a midwife, and she helped me a lot.

But, finally, I found out—I think through the midwife—that this young woman had an aunt living in Monterrey. She somehow got the name, I guess. No, I called her mother and I got the name. I finally got the girl's mother's name, at least, and what part of the country she came from.

So I went down to the consulate and I looked through our files, because I thought, “The aunt's an American. She's going to be registered.” And she was. I called the number that was on the card, but it had been changed. I asked for the new number, but it was unlisted. So I said, “This is a matter of life and death,” and finally got the supervisor, got the number, called the woman, and I explained the whole situation to her, that I was afraid they were going to throw her niece out on the street, and the ready access to drugs in Monterrey was—you know, I don't know if prescriptions are even issued there.

She said, “I've cut myself off from my family. I really have no interest in this. I have to protect my husband.”

I cannot take credit for thinking of this; it had to be divine intervention. I said, “Well, that's all very interesting. Now, of course, when this young woman gets out of the hospital, which she may at any moment, and she goes and buys drugs, which she can do freely here, and she commits suicide, it's not going to be my niece whose name is in the paper. It's not going to be the niece of my husband through marriage, whose name is going to be in the newspaper.”

And she said, “I see what you mean.” So she did go see her, but even then, I didn't know what to do, because we didn't have a consular chief at that time.

So I went to the consul general, who knew nothing about consular work, and I presented him with the situation. He said, “Well, it's the fault of the Mexicans. They shouldn't let crazy people in. So what you do is, you go to the police and you tell them that it's their fault, so they have to deport her.” Well, it was wonderful! What a wonderful idea!

I did it, and they said, “All right, but you have to pay.” So I arranged with Health and Human Resources to meet her at the bridge, and I had to pay for two policemen to go up there and back. The aunt came in. She was going to pay everything. It came to something like $10.55. She said, “Is that all?”

That was an unusual thing, but it was the kind of thing that happened all the time. There were a lot of accidents and people were robbed in their cars on the road, and then someone's son came with his sister—they were of Mexican origin—and he drowned. His sister decided to have him buried locally. Well, the family couldn't bear that. To exhume a body, how expensive that is, they got up the money to do it, and we did the whole thing. After it was over, the mother wrote that she wasn't sure that was her son. Well, that kind of thing is just—so I wrote her and I said, “Oh, you must believe that this is your son. It

has been certified by the government of Mexico that this is your son." I could not have this woman, not believe, after they had probably mortgaged their house to do this. I thought, "Whatever, she's got to believe, because it's done."

People would be jailed on something that wasn't their responsibility, and their attorneys would hold them up for money before they would get them out. It was a horrible place. It's a pit.

Q: You mentioned that this is a traditional society, not very impressed by our titles or anything. Here you are, a woman officer, and women aren't treated with the greatest regard in Mexico. How did you operate, say, with the police? Did you have a problem with the police?

DILLARD: It wasn't a problem like that. It wasn't the womanness of me; it was the Americanness of me. For instance, three young men had come down for a wild weekend in Mexico, and they'd smoke marijuana with some Mexicans. They were all picked up and the Mexicans were released immediately, but the Americans were put in jail. I went to the attorney general. He said, "But these Mexican boys came from good homes."

I said, "So did these Americans." Finally, I could see that I was not going to help their case. In fact, I was probably going to hurt it. So I had to just back down. That probably wasn't the right procedure on my part, but I didn't have a lot of guidance.

Sometimes you are at posts where you are a junior officer and you don't have any guidance and there's no real resource. So you have to make these decisions, and they might be the wrong ones sometimes, but it's important for your staff that you be able to make decisions. You have to think about it and not be foolish, but you have to be able to make decisions and pray that most of them are going to be the right ones. Your staff will realize if you can't make decisions, and that worries them. They get very nervous about that.

Q: Of course they do.

DILLARD: So that's one of the primary things that you've got to do.

Q: There are no real answers to most protection and welfare cases.

DILLARD: Exactly. They are all seat of the pants. They never happened before. You're never going to find the same case again.

Q: You say you got out of Monterrey after so many minutes and so many seconds.

DILLARD: Right. [Laughter]

Q: You went back to Washington.

DILLARD: Yes. I had had to buy furniture to go to Mexico, and I thought, “I may never see my furniture again unless I go to Washington.” So I pleaded to go to Washington. It was a very good experience, particularly after a post like Monterrey, where there was no real life to speak of, very little cultural life, very little anything. So it was quite an experience, and I bought season tickets to everything at the Kennedy Center. [Laughter] I was lucky enough to live only three away. I was very fortunate when I got back.

Q: Rather than dwell on the time in the visa office, can we talk a little about the career development and your impressions? You were dealing with consular officers.

DILLARD: Yes.

Q: I might add that I had that job a long, long time ago, back in the late 1960s. What period was this that we're talking about?

DILLARD: This was 1976 to 1979.

Q: What was your impression of the consular corps, what we call “cone,” and how it was treated? You're talking about the mid-level officer, aren't you?

DILLARD: Right. I thought that I could do a good job in that position. I very much wanted the job and had to work hard to get it. It was a good time to be a career development officer, I think, because the central personnel system generally worked. Central personnel did decide assignments, with appropriate input from bureaus.

Q: There's always the geographic bureau and the central personnel, and there's always a conflict about who controls the assignments.

DILLARD: Yes. I was fortunate that I was CDO for consular officers, because bureaus hadn't, at that point, focused on how important consular officers are. So I didn't have as much problem as probably the econ and the political CDOs had.

At that time, there wasn't a program in place to give consular officers out-of-cone tours. It seemed to me that if consular officers were going to be competitive for DCM jobs or the big consul general jobs, they had to have other experience. So I worked extremely hard to get people into other kinds of jobs when they came back to Washington, or to get them into the economics course. They were looking for econ officers, so there was a chance to get people into what was then the 26-week course, and an onward econ assignment. There was also a shortage of labor officer, so it was possible to get labor training and an onward labor job for consular officers.

I tried to help people look at the idea of getting out-of-cone experience as a positive thing, and then I tried to obtain it for them. We had a lot of success in that. Also we showed that consular officers were Foreign Service officers, broad Foreign Service officers.

Q: At this particular point in time, you had a pretty good chance to sample the caliber and the morale of people who were concentrating as consular officers. How would you rate them as to caliber and as to morale?

DILLARD: I think that we were top drawer. We had a staff corps. That had been the program that I'd come in under, and a lot of people had remained in. We had inherited a lot of people who had not done well in other cones, so we had our share, but I don't think our share of people who were not tops was any greater than that of any other cone. We had people who were going to be good, solid officers and maybe no balls of fire, but we also had some real go-getters. I think we may have been even a little bit better off than the other cones.

The problem was to make sure that everybody had an equal chance to prove themselves. I worked with a lot of people and tried to get them to take the exam to become full officers.

I worked with minorities and women quite a bit. I think morale was fairly good. I felt that it was my duty to my clients to convince them that I cared and that I was good enough that I could hold sway on their behalf. I think that's necessary, because when you're in the field, you need to feel someone's looking after your interests. I wasn't the only one who felt that way, and I wasn't the only one who operated that way. I think it was a good time then. Unfortunately, we go through periodic cycles. We're not in that kind of cycle right now.

Q: You went to London. I remember when I was a career management officer, what you would call career development officer, there was a tendency in personnel to take London and Paris and some other places, more at the middle level, not at the upper and not at the junior level, but to take your problem people, and not only from the consular specialty, but from some others who have got problems—often alcoholism or personality problems or what have you, and say, "Well, it won't hurt if we put them in London. Nobody will notice it. Or we'll put them in Paris."

The problem was that when I was there, this was another era, but I suddenly noticed that we had staffed London's consular section almost completely with “problem officers.”

DILLARD: Oh, I know exactly what you mean. I think we used to do that a lot during the time I was in personnel. I can think of one post where we never really provided them with good officers, and it was a shame. I don't know how that happened. Somehow it was not seen as being that important.

I know Vern McAninch left under a cloud, but I think he was one of the best managers that I ever ran into in the Foreign Service. When he was in Mexico, I had some lower mid-level officers who weren't that good, and I'd send them to him, and he would say, “Why do you send me these people?”I'd say, “Because I know you can get the best out of that person. That person will feel fulfilled and will do a good job for you.” I mean, that's a terrible thing to do to people, but you tend to have to do that with people who can manage with whoever you and them.

So it does happen. It is often easier to find a role for limited people in a big post.

Q: Putting this in practice, you went to London and you were in charge of the non-immigrant visas.

DILLARD: That's right.

Q: How did you find the staff? What was the operation like?

DILLARD: At that time we had 12 junior officers, and we had three mid-level officers, 03 officers. When I got there, just two of the three were supervising junior officers. I made all three supervisors. We had such turnover, because the JOs only stayed 18 months—they were in our section for a year—that we probably had 45 people in the two years that I was there.

It was a hard job. Of these three people, they weren't going to go to the top, but they worked flat out. You had to realize that their priorities were different from yours. I was responsible for the whole section. At one point we had 65 people in the section. We had such a volume of work, we had PITs, we had contracts. But 65 people!

Q: PITs being part-time, interim employees.

DILLARD: Yes. We had to just go out in the street, practically, and pull people in to work. I tried to manage all that kind of stuff, all the nationals. I supervised the nationals and the PITs and that crowd.

When junior officers have not yet received tenure, the DCM is basically responsible for their progress. In a big post, it would go to the consul general. So the consul general did work with the junior officers, and I worked with the junior officers. Their supervisors mainly were responsible for making schedules for the various jobs, training them on how to do the various jobs, and keeping an eye out after them. I think they did pretty well. One did not really labor over the performance reports as he should. They were all somewhat limited. So I didn't want to put too much on them, because I wanted them to work with the junior officers in the best way they could, because that was very important. It was a factory.

What we tried to do was make enough separate tasks that people could rotate, not do the same thing all day, just to keep them from going out of their minds. Then I picked a specific task outside the regular work for each one. For instance, I would have one prepare a manual on how you deal with treaty traders, or I had one redesign the office so it would work better. You know, after one batch left, you could do the same things over again, update your manuals and such. But I wanted each one to have something different and something he or she could look back on and say, “I did that when I was there.” It also gave us something to write about.

I learned from Vern McAninch that you have to work with the material you're given. There was a limit to what I could expect from these three supervisors. I mean, they were all about 50 years old and they couldn't kill themselves over this. It was too late to require that. They just didn't have the drive to do that. So you had to work with what you had. It was not the work that caused me to leave.

Q: What were some of the other pressures? Were you getting many pressures from elsewhere in the embassy on non-immigrant visas, or were you completely in isolation?

DILLARD: The consular section almost wasn't part of the embassy, you see, even though it took over the whole ground floor—unless someone needed a visa for somebody. I had worked very closely with the agency people and got a great deal of support from them, but other than that, the consular section was not really a part of the embassy.

When I went to London, I was recruited to go to London. We three chiefs of branches within the section felt that we were very much part of running the thing. It wasn't that easy. I did run into some problems as a woman from one colleague, and that was not pleasant.

Q: How did this manifest itself?

DILLARD: This was the staff aide to the consul general. He had a way of saying things about people that made the consul general unhappy, but it wasn't anything you could really put your finger on. I had to fight a lot of battles, and it made it unpleasant, because we had a tremendous workload. You don't have 12 junior officers, which later went up to 15, to do just non-immigrant visa work, unless you've got a million visa applicants, which we had.

At the same time, they were putting in this AVLOS system, as we talked about earlier, which meant that you had people in working as you were trying to work. You were trying to use the system. It would fail. You'd have to make decisions, like, “We'll just give all the visas and we'll worry about the checks later.” You had to cope with all the people coming.

You had to have a drop-box system, so people wouldn't have to be interviewed. People would come in and drop their passports in a black box. We would review the passports and decide if we had to interview them or if we could just issue. You had thousands of mail-in applications.

You had a waiting room that was hot and crowded and noisy. You had a situation where at the end of the day, you might have 800 people outside waiting to collect their passports. They would get unhappy if we'd have a hot day, which was unusual, or if we'd have a rainy day, and we just could not let them in the building. We had to hand them the passports through the door; there was no other way to handle it. Some days I'd have to go outside and get them to line up and convince them this was going to work, or we'd go out with baskets in the morning to collect their passports. It was a mill. It was incredible.

Then they redesigned the consular section, which meant at one point we were 30 people in an area far too small for ten. That was a very hard period. That nearly drove us all mad, but we survived that. When you have that many people, it really becomes a management problem. We ended up, at one point, deluged with passports. We received 30,000 passports for visas one day.

Q: Good God!

DILLARD: Because of a mail strike. We had a new admin counselor who didn't understand that we really did need to have some contract employees on board before this happened. Then when he finally authorized the hiring, we had to just get them as fast as we could and find places for them to sit. All our desks were fortified with boxes of passports, just great big boxes full of passports around every desk. And the public would get panicky about their passports and want them now.

The directions from the Department were, “Keep them outside and tell them they'll have to wait.” The consul general and I deduced that that was only going to make enemies for us. So we decided to let people in to look for their passports if they couldn't wait, because

then they would see that we weren't keeping their passports from them. The boxes were by day of receipt, so we'd try to figure out when their passport had been received. They'd go through the boxes, and when they found it, it was like Swensen's ice cream parlor, if you remember that. We carried on, how wonderful! Every British person is a character underneath, we had some great ones. Finally, I think it was CBS which came and did a little program on us and got some of the best characters on tape. The Department was very unhappy about this. But it helped the public understand our situation.

Q: Why was the Department unhappy?

DILLARD: They didn't like us airing our dirty linen like that, I guess. I don't know. I don't know if they thought we should be able to cope better or not, but the national employees never, never faltered. They were incredible.

The year that I arrived, in August, we had a backlog of—oh, I don't know how much, but we had a backlog. At Christmas, finally, just before Christmas, I got the admin counselor to let me have any other nationals in the building who wanted to work. We got some of the guard force and the telephone operators to come in after hours and they opened the envelopes of passports and they got everything ready for us. So we were able to clear it up. After that agreement, the locals would say, “Well, it will all be cleared up. We'll get cleared up by Christmas.” They never, never panicked, they never faltered.

Q: That's wonderful.

DILLARD: We had a situation where the locals—we kind of had an agitator in the group, which was fine. In a way, it was excellent, because she probably voiced concerns of a lot of the national employees. So I asked her to get a list of questions people wanted to ask and to be prepared. We would have a big staff meeting of everybody, all 65 people, and I would attempt to answer their questions. It went well. They were pleased. I kept pressing

them about having another meeting. They said, “We don't have any more questions.” So we just had parties instead.

Q: Why did you leave to volunteer for “sunny Beirut?” In a minute we'll come to what the situation was like in Beirut. One does not go to that voluntarily.

DILLARD: The weather in London got to me and the crowds got to me. London is such a crowded city, and working with as many people as I did was enough people for me. Also, having served in Washington, I had fallen prey to the real estate bug, and I had overextended myself. London was a very expensive town, and it was dark and rainy, and I couldn't afford to do much.

Then the situation changed at work. We were no longer part of a team directing this great effort; we were just “clerks” who were responding to direction. So, since the work had been the main interest there, and I felt that I did not get along that well with the consul general, and he was going to find that out sooner or later, it behooved me to move along.

So I volunteered to go to Beirut because it was sunny and I could make some money. And I never regretted it.

Q: What was the time frame and the situation in Beirut? Why was it a matter of volunteering for it?

DILLARD: There had been a civil war in Beirut since 1975, and this was 1982. Two days after I volunteered to go to Beirut, the Israelis invaded Lebanon, and my career development officer told me I could withdraw my volunteer if I wanted to, but I didn't.

I left London in August and was supposed to go to Beirut in September, but in September occurred the massacres at two Palestinian refugee camps.

Q: Sabra and Shatila.

DILLARD: Following that, the newly elected president of the country, who had not yet taken office, Bashir Gemayel, was assassinated. So the Department suggested that I wait a few weeks.

So when I finally went; they had just moved back to the embassy proper. The staff had previously been evacuated to East Beirut and operated out of the ambassador's residence there and in some other buildings. There had not been a consul general since April. One of the junior officers was doing a magnificent job of running the section.

Q: Who was that?

DILLARD: That was Lisa Piasick. I'm sure it must have been very difficult for her to accept my coming after she had been doing that and had managed the thing all during that very hectic summer.

It seemed to be not that big a job at the time. This was in October. October 16, 1982 is when I arrived. The Israelis finally withdrew. We had the multinational forces. It seemed to be going well. The French patrolled the downtown area and the Americans were at the airport. The Italians had a hospital. Then a small British group came. The workload was difficult enough, but I had some good junior officers, and they did an excellent job. The national staff was wonderful.

Q: What type of workload are you talking about?

DILLARD: You know, I can't really remember now, but we had the problem that you so often have, that the nationals don't want to do the non-immigrant visa work. So I changed the concept. I changed to teams, and I had two teams, kind of like the “inside” team and the “outside” team. We had some people who weren't that good with the public, but who were very good workers. We had others who were excellent with the public. So instead of a non-immigrant visa team and an immigrant visa team, I just changed it to the “public-

dealing team” and “the others.” Everyone learned everybody else's job. So that kept me busy during the winter.

Then on April 18, six months after I arrived, the embassy was blown up and five of my employees were killed and four of them were injured, some more severely than others. So we were quite a small staff.

Q: Could you explain what happened and how you experienced this?

DILLARD: There was an office in town, a Palestinian office, and I had received a lot of complaints about that office from American tourists who had no business being in Lebanon. They complained that if they tried to take photographs in that neighborhood, people in “pajamas” would come out and try to take their cameras away and such. And “I'm going to write my congressman that you won't do anything about this.” That was one of our big problems. That building got blown up in February, but then everything settled down. There would be sniper fire and there would be battles in far off parts of the town and such.

Then on April 18, it was raining and it was cold. I had gone home for lunch. I had a woman come in to clean one morning a week, then she came at noontime to walk my dog every day. But when I came home one afternoon she was there, and she explained to me that she was going to have to have her “blood pressure removed,” so she wouldn't be able to walk the dog for a while. I started coming home for lunch, and I preferred it. I only lived three minutes away. So I had gone home for lunch and walked the dog.

I was in the house, and I still had my raincoat on because it was cold. I was heating some soup, and what I thought was a tremendous clap of thunder occurred. It really hurt my ears, and then the windows fell in; so I knew that it wasn't thunder. I went to the phone to call my family, because I knew whatever it was, they were going to hear about it, you know. I always called them when things happened. The phone was dead. I went next door,

across the hall, to ask my neighbor if she had any idea what had happened; she had lived there for a number of years and she would have had the news on.

Just then, the DCM's wife came down the stairs and said it was the embassy, and that she was going there.

Q: Bonnie Pugh.

DILLARD: It was Bonnie Pugh, yes. My neighbor said, “It is the embassy.” We could see the back of the embassy from her apartment, and it looked fine. There was smoke coming up from the top, but it really looked fine. So I asked her to take my dog, because although she had glass, too, she was going to be there, and I couldn't leave him with the glass lying all over the place.

I went down, and people had started coming out the back of the embassy, and the ambassador came out.

Q: Bob Dillon.

DILLARD: Bob Dillon. Then Bob Pugh came out after a bit. I told him that his wife had come down to find him. He said, “Find her and tell her that I'm all right and I'll be home shortly.” So I went back to our building, and she wasn't there, but then she and the ambassador arrived. The guards had seen the ambassador come out and had put him in a van on the floor, and they saw her and put her in the van, too. Then Bob Pugh came along, and he said, “I'll be down in a minute and we'll go and decide what we're going to do.”

So I got some pencil and paper and we headed back to the embassy, and he took charge. He is a take-charge person. He's a decisive person, which is exactly what you need in that kind of situation. So the first task that I was given was to try to locate everyone, to find out

the whereabouts of everyone, and that's what I did, and tried to check out rumors. You can imagine what it was. The explosion happened at 1:06, right after lunch.

What had happened is someone had driven a little truck loaded with explosives, right into the building, and the explosion happened from underneath the building. So a whole section was gone, and all the floors fell, and the whole middle section of the building was destroyed.

We heard that they were going to take some wounded to the old French Embassy on the east side, which had been blown up some time earlier in this continuing war, so I got a doctor and a jeep and two other people. Lisa was one of them. It took us a long time to work our way through the traffic. Everybody was coming to see our explosion; so we had to fight our way through.

We got out there, and nobody ever came, but it worked out well because it gave us a breathing spell. I was virtually the only person who had not been in the embassy at the time, so I didn't suffer the shock of the explosion. (The juniors were really shocked and distraught, as everyone was, and one was hurt in the explosion.)

Then it really began. We went back to the American University Hospital, where everyone was taken. I tried to get a fix on who was there and who wasn't and where we stood; the hospital promised that they would have this information for me at, I think, 8:00 that night. Meantime, I tried to visit the ones I could find, and see how they were and find out what their situation was, and note that they were there.

Then one of the doctors asked me if I would come to the morgue and try to help them identify a woman's husband. What they wanted was for me to look at the bodies and pick out two or three who could be her husband. I went in, and you know, they all looked alike there. They were all covered by a fine, gray dust. When you blow up a building, there's an awful lot of gray cement dust.

Q: I've been involved after an earthquake. I went to a morgue after an earthquake in Yugoslavia, and people do look alike.

DILLARD: Yes.

Q: Faces get drawn.

DILLARD: Yes, it's amazing. So the doctor said, “Of course, that's Bill McIntyre and this is Ragib.” So I looked at them and I could say, yes, they were those people. So I thought, “Okay, it is possible to tell who they are.”

I looked at all the bodies that were there, and I remembered that this man—you know, the embassy was in an old hotel, and there was not that much exchange between floors or offices, so I didn't know all the people that well, even though I'd been there for six months. It was not an easy embassy in which to get to know people. But I knew her husband, and I remembered his teeth were kind of squared off. They came out in right angles almost. There was this one body, and I thought, “Well, that's his teeth. I know those are his teeth.” And the top of his head was blown off and his middle was all open.

So I asked if they could put a cloth over his head, down across his forehead and one across his middle before they showed her. She came in and said, no, that wasn't her husband. I thought, “Well, if that isn't her husband, then I'm not going to be able to do this job.” It was her husband. They finally found something in his pocket that she recognized as being his. But she couldn't accept it, you know.

Then after that, my job, of course, as consular officer came down to all the corporal works of mercy, visiting the sick, identifying the dead. I was very fortunate in that there was a young woman who was studying dentistry, who was also a Red Cross volunteer. She had a very clinical, dispassionate view of the bodies; she called me over once and showed me a row of teeth. It wasn't a mouth; it had become a row of teeth. She said, “Now, I think this could be an American filling, don't you?” I thought, “Well,. . .” I said, “It could be any filling.”

But that helped me tremendously. I realized that we weren't talking about people; we were talking about empty vessels. The people were no longer there. That made it a lot more possible to work with this.

I didn't realize how involved I was. I didn't even notice the odor in the morgue. I mean, some, but it didn't affect me that much. I was in there all the time. People would come in and not be able to stay, and they didn't understand how I could. My body protected me. My shock was—I didn't realize I was in shock. I was kind of disengaged from the whole thing. I cared about the people, but I was kind of like an observer. That was the perfect shock to get, you know, because it was exactly the way to carry through. But I felt that I should be reacting, so I would try to go out for half an hour or so on the corniche, the riverfront, with my dog every afternoon. The Marines knew where I was, but wouldn't tell anyone. I'd try to make myself cry, because I felt that this was right; I needed to do this. So that probably helped.

Then we got a message that Mr. [Lawrence] Eagleburger wanted to come out and collect the American bodies and take them back to the States. He wanted to come on Wednesday and leave on Thursday. I knew that this wouldn't work, but it took me a while to figure out why it wouldn't; that we wouldn't have the bodies yet. We wouldn't have everybody. So, finally, we dissuaded him, so he came Friday and went back Saturday.

Q: He was the Under Secretary for Management, I think.

DILLARD: I think he was, yes. In truth, we found the last body at 5:30 on Friday. I had been having the undertaker go ahead—they embalmed the bodies—go ahead and put them in caskets, because of the time constraints. We had 17 Americans. The caskets had to be lined in zinc, you know, because they were leaving the country. So I was having him do that as we went along.

Then we got a request on Thursday, “Can you verify that nothing has been added to these bodies or these caskets?” Because the President was going to walk in front of the caskets

and maybe somebody had put an explosive in. Well, this was kind of—how could I say, you know, “I'm certain there's nothing in there”? I couldn't do that. So I had to go back to my buddies at the hospital, the acting director, and say that we had to open all the caskets, and he understood, but the people in the morgue were very hurt, and I don't blame them. Because I'm saying, “I don't trust you,” which was very hard, because we were certainly working together. But I didn't know how to look for explosives. I didn't know anything about that, you know.

Coming on the plane with Mr. Eagleburger were a number of people, one of whom was a military person. So we decided that this military person would be the one to look in the caskets, because we didn't know how to do this.

Then it dawned on me that after he's checked the caskets and bodies, what happens? They could still do something to them. So I convinced the DCM that I had to have some Marines to take to the hospital morgue to guard the bodies. I had two fire teams, I didn't want to spend the night with a bunch of bodies, you know. But we marched smartly up there. The Lebanese didn't want to let them in, because there was a bomb scare against the hospital. I had a fun time talking the Lebanese military into letting my Marines into their hospital.

Anyway, so we got there. We had 17 bodies, but one man was a Quaker and his wife decided she wanted him cremated and his ashes spread there. So we had 16 caskets to be checked. We had this poor man who had to—they'd open a casket and he'd look in and say, “Um-hum.” They'd say, “See?” and he'd say, “Um-hum.” Then they'd close the casket. He didn't know any more about it than I did, you know.

Q: Somebody had to at least go through the gesture.

DILLARD: In the middle of this, a military team came with the flags to be put on the caskets, and the leader said, “Well, what is this?” This was Friday afternoon. Here we hadn't yet found the last body. “I can't put up with this. I can't stay here all night doing this.”

I said, “Well, they'll be here all night. They'll put the flags on.”

“They don't know how to put the flags on.”

I said, “Look, we've got a casket in there we don't have to open. That man's going to be cremated. They can practice with that one. Show them how to do it. Have them do it any number of times.” He was really a grouch, but we got that squared away.

Anyway, I had to be back there at 5:00 the next morning because the ceremony at the airport was going to be at 7:15. The military chaplain wanted to go with me. He never showed up, so I finally went, getting there about 5:20, and the Marines were very glad to see me. The Lebanese military would not let the ambulances come to the hospital. The Lebanese asked me to please go talk to the military commander, which meant getting him out of bed, to get him to change his mind. Well, of course, he wasn't going to say, “Yes,” and I wanted a lot of time. When I got back, the chaplain had gotten there, and he was praying over every casket separately, and I thought, “We've got to get this show on the road. Let's do it in the car.”

What we had to do was just terrible. Thank God we had these Marines, because we had to load a casket on this steel rolling bed, roll it down an incline, up an incline, down a very steep incline, and then up the street to the street corner, where there were so many newsmen and photographers. We had one hearse, the rest were ambulances and station wagons. We put two caskets to a vehicle. But in the station wagons, they wouldn't fit, and you had to kind of put one on top of the other. The handles had broken on the caskets because they were so heavy with the zinc linings. These poor Marines were laboring so hard.

Then it occurred to me, “I'd better get up there and guard the vehicles. Somebody could put something in one of the vehicles.” So I was standing up at the top of the street, observing the whole scene, and it was incredible. The undertaker was a very fat man. I mean, he looked like a movie character; he didn't look like a real person. The traffic was starting by this time. It was getting close to 7:00. He would direct people one way, and his assistant would direct them another way. All this was going on with the photographers and these poor guys sweating to get the caskets in with some kind of dignity. Well, I thought, really, if you loved Beirut and you died in Beirut, this was right. This was the way it should be. It was so Lebanese.We had one Marine for each vehicle, and I rode in the hearse because there was room for three people. The Marine who rode with me said, “The people who are in the Guard of Honor, who are going to move the caskets at the airport, are all lording it over everybody. Thank God I only had to do it at the hospital where nobody was watching.”

We drove like maniacs, and photographers were in cars with sunroofs, and they were hanging out and would come screeching by and take photographs. The military didn't want to let us through, you know. There were checkpoints everywhere. I mean, it was just incredible.

We got to the airport, and here was this man who was concerned about the flags. [Laughter] He came over to the hearse. Of course, the caskets had slid up and down with the rough driving. He said, “Why do you have the caskets way up there? We can't get to those caskets.”

I said, “Well, goodbye,” and I left to join my embassy colleagues at the service, and then sweated over were the honor guard going to drop the caskets.

But then that was just the beginning. You go through all that, and then you have to start to work. You have to rebuild your section, you have to find your files, you have to dig things out of the garbage. You have to try to reconstruct your immigrant visa files. You have to

be there for your employees. The five employees I had left were distraught. You had to give them something to do while you were still trying to find the bodies. You had to run the section. It was very difficult. It was a very difficult time, and we didn't have an office, so I did it from my home and had to steal a typewriter here, a chair there, try to give the employees something to do.

Q: So you were running the consular section from your home?

DILLARD: Yes. I set a target date for reopening for consular business, because I felt that was important for the Lebanese, the whole of Lebanon, and certainly for the employees. US policy was, “We're here. Life goes on. Business goes on, and life is going to return to normal.” Nobody cared about anything in the embassy but the consular section at that point; so we had to operate. We had to process as many people as we could, and we had to do it every day. That, I felt, was very important for our foreign policy at that point.

Q: What sort of support were you getting from the rest of the embassy?

DILLARD: Everybody was in shock. A lot of people were wounded. As much support as they could give. I didn't get much in the way of office equipment. I had to go out and steal things. I'd go back to the old embassy. Because I knew these Marines, even though we weren't supposed to go in there anymore, I could go in and get what I needed and set up my office.

At this time there were so many concerns. We were still looking for bodies. We were still having to deal with the bereaved. Some people just disappeared; they just didn't exist anymore. You'd find maybe feet with beige socks or something like that. I had to suggest to people that they go home and try to figure out exactly what their beloved was wearing that day, including shoes and socks.

Q: Now we're talking about visa applicants?

DILLARD: Yes, there were visa applicants who were killed, there were employees who we never saw again, who may have been blown out to sea. So all these things continued, even though we were trying to set up operations and go on. We still had these concerns on behalf of Lebanese who disappeared.

Q: I find it incredible that you were able to function at all.

DILLARD: Well, we did. We did all right. We tried to get as much together in files as we could. It gave people something to do, you see. This was the big thing. I wanted the employees to be busy all the time, because they were very distraught. So I had them retype the cards that we had rescued. I had them make new cards. If all we had was a card, then we made a paper that Immigration agreed to accept. If people came to see us to ask about their immigrant cases, we'd ask them to bring us any papers that they had, like just a letter sending them packet three or whatever. We used that as the basis for the file. We built up files as best we could. Immigration didn't give us any problem.

Q: What sort of support were you getting from Washington, from the consular section?

DILLARD: We didn't have that much feel that we were getting anything. We were just cut off. We felt like we were there alone. We were churning this out. It was probably not that the Department wasn't supporting us, but we weren't aware of it. I don't know. We had to have TDYers if anybody went out on leave, so we had to fight to get a TDY.

Q: TDY is a temporary duty person from another post.

DILLARD: Yes. We had to get out. The Department insisted that each one of us who was there come back on a rest and recuperation trip within two months, which was a good thing. For example, while the Eagleburger group was there, before that plane left, I asked that I be assigned a TDY consular officer to help me, because the two junior officers were really very psychologically wounded, and they had a lot of recovering to do. It took three weeks to get somebody. Now, I thought that was appalling. I think the only reason that

they even got me anybody was that I came up with the name of somebody, and I don't know why I even thought of that person. It was one of the people who had worked for me in London, and I knew that—well, I don't know. I just came up with his name, and I knew after I said it that, yes, he would be good. He would be able to step in and help me.

Q: This is interesting, how an organization responds.

DILLARD: We're trying to do better, you know.

Q: They responded poorly. This is 1983, so this is not unheard of. We'd been through quite a bit of things.

DILLARD: Exactly. I felt there could have been a better response, but I'm operating from a very self-centered view. We did get the TDYers in, we were able to take the leave that we needed. You could only go out once every five months, and you needed to go out more often because everything was so intense. But they couldn't send in that many people.

Q: How long were you there?

DILLARD: I stayed until August of 1984.

Q: Did it move into more of a routine, or was it still very—

DILLARD: No, we moved pretty fast into a routine, because that's the beauty of consular work. You get the visa request and you act on it or you don't act on it. You do your immigrant visas, you do your American services. I mean, we didn't have to go out and try to summon our wits to interpret the political situation or make demarches or anything like that; we just had to get those visa applicants processed.

Of course, we had tremendous fraud problems. We had to have a lot of guards to screen people before they came in. We moved from my apartment to another apartment right next door to my building, actually to just part of an apartment. It was so noisy. One of my forays

into the old embassy was to steal some carpeting to put up on the walls and the floor to deaden the noise. It was just terrible. Of course, the system that the SeaBees built for us, they built a wall with plexiglass in which they put interviewing holes. Well, the hole was down here or way up here. You couldn't really have a conversation, so you'd have to hang around the side to do your interviews. So the guards had to really screen people. But they became involved in fraud, and we just had so many such situations, it was very hectic.

We seemed to be going along very well, but then somebody would get a phone call and fall to pieces, and you'd just have to go over and embrace the person. The tension was incredible, even when we got into the routine. And the routine was what saved people. That's why I was very anxious to get a routine started for these employees, these locals, because they'd lost friends, it was their country that was going down the tubes, and the shock of the embassy being blown up was a tremendous shock for the people of Lebanon, because we were supposed to be invulnerable. So we got our routine going, and you had to work so hard, you didn't have time to think about anything else.

Q: How about the threat of kidnapping?

DILLARD: That first happened in March of 1984. The first one was the station chief. We were restricted. In December 1983, I did not like to go into town anymore. I tinted my hair dark and I wore scarves, and I tried to be very low profile. Everybody thought I was crazy, but I didn't think it was wise to go into town. Sometimes you had to. Then we started going with guards and drivers for our shopping or whatever. We didn't yet have the road blocked off. We didn't block the road off, as I recall, until they started kidnapping people. Then we all moved into the compound.

But the one man, Buckley, the station chief, really, he did not take any precautions. In staff meetings, he was always saying, “So and So was at such and such place three times this week. Now you know you're not supposed to do things like that.” Well, he still had diplomatic plates on his car. He drove himself to work, he left at the same time, he came

home at the same time, and it was as though he was inviting this. Another man lived in the same building with him, and he would call the embassy when it was time to come to work, and they would come with a guard to pick him up. It was a very hard thing for us when the kidnapping happened.

Q: You came back after a very difficult time. What sort of—"reception" is maybe the wrong term, but I'm thinking, professionally, was anybody picking your brains about how to do this? Were you able to pass on your experience of this very difficult time?

DILLARD: Not right away. In the first place, one very bad thing happened to me. Right after the explosion, I was talking to Washington the evening of the explosion, updating them on the whereabouts of people as I could determine, and I said, "Could you call my family and tell them that I was home walking the dog, that I'm all right?" I was told, "Oh, yes. Oh, yes, of course we will." So then a couple of hours later, after I'd been to the hospital and I had come back, I said, "Did you talk to my family?" And the person said, "Oh, yes. They were delighted." They hadn't called my family. Now, you know, it's one thing to not do it, but you could say, "Look, I'm sorry. We haven't had time."

So two days later, I happened to come home from a trip to the hospital before I went out to look for bodies again, and the phone was ringing. It was my brother-in-law saying, "Are you alive? We haven't heard anything." There was a big snafu—I was dealing daily with the Department, yet, for instance, the FLO people didn't know and weren't told that I was alive.

Q: Family liaison office.

DILLARD: They were the ones who were dealing with the families, but they didn't know that I was all right. So that was very bad.

When I came back on that R & R that they made us take—which was right; I desperately needed to get out of there—I got a cold reception when I went to the NEA Bureau. It

was not warm and not supportive at all. I tried to say a couple of things and was kind of ignored.

Q: NEA being Near Eastern Bureau.

DILLARD: Yes. Then basically, I went home to bed, you know, for two weeks. After that, when I'd come out of Beirut, on the next trip I took, I had waited too long and I'd gotten very wrung out. So I stopped in London for a week to try to get myself in shape before my family saw me. That was in November. I determined that I wasn't going to do that again, and I made plans to go out in March and meet friends in Athens and get away. That was good. You needed to do that. Even so, your adrenaline stayed up. You didn't really collapse when you knew you were going back. When I came out the last time in August 1984, I really did collapse, you know, just like the air had gone out of the balloon.

Back in Washington, I had just about gotten myself in shape when they blew up the embassy annex in September. The Department asked me if I would go out to Dover with General Chain and his helicopter and meet the families of the two Department of Defense people who were killed. He was head of Pol-Mil then, I think. I did that. I went out there. He meant well, we had a memorial service and their burial and everything. After that, I just got on the plane and went to London for a week to try to get myself together, where I lost my passport—it was the typical stress reaction. The whole embassy was amused, you know, that I did that.

So I was in Washington until the next September, when I went to Florence. I had talked to Sheila Platt shortly before I left. She wanted to know my experiences.

Q: She was whom?

DILLARD: She's a clinical social worker, and I think she was under some kind of contract to the Department. She's Nick Platt's wife.

In May, I got a request to come back to the Department to help make a video for Marilyn Holmes, who works for the Department of Security, she makes videos, and she tries to concentrate on the human side of tragedy. She is wonderful. So she was going to make a video on crisis workers, I wasn't sure that I wanted to do that, but then my mother said, “You know, it might be good for you to talk about it now.” So I talked with Marilyn and Sheila for hours, but I had forgotten a lot of the stuff. Sheila had kept notes from our earlier talk, and she said, “I remember you said such and such,” and I'd forgotten that. That brought home to me that I was getting well, you know. So it turned out to be very therapeutic for me to do that.

Q: I think we'd better cut this off here. I hate to do it.

DILLARD: That's all—if it's helpful.

Q: It's very helpful.

DILLARD: Good.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview